Margrett Scaff's birth and parentage

In a review some years ago,[1] I concluded that Margrett was Ezekiel Scaff's daughter from his second marriage to Elizabeth Dunn rather than from his first marriage to Elizabeth Hill; and that she was born in Georgia in about 1855, rather than in South Carolina in 1853 as reported on her death certificate.

But new information contained in two Chancery suits over John Scaff's estate[2] calls some of my earlier conclusions into question. Ezekiel Scaff was one of the petitioners in both suits. The first was filed on 20 November 1851 and the second was filed on 25 January 1854 and is especially relevant to this review as it names Ezekiel's children, including Margrett and a previously unknown daughter, Marintha.

This sighting of Ezekiel Scaff is important as it places him in Darlington County through at least 1854. Heretofore, the last record found for him there was when he sold 325 acres "whereon I now live...between Sparrow Swamp and Lake Swamp on Big Branch waters of Sparrow Swamp" on 2 December 1841, and the earliest record found for him thus far in Georgia was the 1856 tax list for Houston County.[3]

Gaps in records for Darlington County

I was unable to find Ezekiel in 1850 in either Georgia or South Carolina though these Chancery suit records now clearly place him in the latter. But the 1850 census for Darlington is obviously incomplete as it fails to turn up others who should have been found, i.e., John Scaff's widow Emmilla and his daughters Sarah Morris, Chloe Hill and Mary Hill. For some reason Riley Scaff was enumerated twice.[4]

Trying to track down deeds related to the land referenced in the Chancery suit led to unanswered questions about Ezekiel's holdings. Only two deeds have been found for him, when he bought 325 acres from James Hill in 1838 and sold it to Thomas Stephenson in 1841.[5] Yet when Riley Scaff sold a tract in 1849, the deed said, "the 124 acres sold to Ezekiel Scaff excepted."[6] And when the Chancery court commissioners sold 248 acres belonging to John Scaff's estate in February 1854, it was described as

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[1] "Ezekiel Scaff's two marriages," uploaded to the Newman Family Tree on 21 Aug 2012, with a comment since added by this compiler to note that the information is incorrect and would be updated.
[2] Darlington County, South Carolina, Equity court records (loose papers), 1805-1871; images, FamilySearch (https:www.familysearch.org); (first suit) Bills no. 309-326, microfilm no. 317591; Bill no. 317, imgs 344-384; (second suit) Bills no. 453-465, microfilm no. 317600; Bill no. 457, imgs 193-211.. See "John Scaff estate, Darlington County, South Carolina, Bills in Equity (Chancery Court)", December 2020, by this compiler.
[3] "Tax digest, 1856-1860", image 65, in Georgia, Houston County, tax records, 1829-1869 collection, FamilySearch. Ezekiel reported on this tax list that he had two children between the ages of 6 and 18 but he would have had three: Sarah would have been about age 14, Emily age 11 and John Early age 8.
[4] Riley was also on the 1850 agriculture schedule in Divisions 3 and 4, and there's a Wm Morris and a Thomas Hill in Division 4. On the slave schedule, there is a Wm Morris in Division 1 but no Scaffs and no Thomas or Ezekiel Hill.
[5] Darlington County, South Carolina, Deed Book O, pp. 7-8, images 360-361, FamilySearch.
[6] Darlington Co., SC, Deed Book Q, p. 304, image 426, FamilySearch.

being situated between Lake Swamp and Sparrow Swamp, bounded by Ezekiel Scaff and others.[7] In the latter case he could have resided on the land without owning it, but what happened to the 124 acres Riley sold to him when Ezekiel relocated to Georgia?

Ezekiel's children

The second suit filed on 25 January 1854 names the children of Ezekiel as "Cloe Scaff *(sic)*, Sarah A. Scaff, Emily P. Scaff, J. Early Scaff, Margaret M. Scaff and Marintha Scaff all of whom are under the age of twenty one, the youngest being less than one year of age."[8] In the January 30th amended bill it was reported that Marintha had died[9] but it does not say whether the original bill was in error or Marintha had died in the five days since it was filed. The ordering of the children suggests they were named from oldest to youngest but this ordering was not wholly consistent throughout the record[10] and I've reconsidered my first conclusion that Marintha was the youngest child, as explained below.

Why Ezekiel's children were named while he was still living

John Scaff's will[11] directed that after his wife's death the slaves were to be divided between his children Riley Scaff, Sarah Morris, Mary Hill and Chloe Hill and ***the children of Ezekiel Scaff***:

- Chloe Scaff was likely the C. Scaff, born in about 1840 and living with Ezekiel and Chloe (Scaff) Hill in the 1860 Darlington County census so she apparently chose to remain in Darlington when Ezekiel moved the family to Georgia.
- Sarah A. Scaff was born in about March 1842 according to the 1900 Wilcox County, Georgia census.
- Emily P. Scaff was born on 31 December 1845 according to her grave marker.
- J. Early aka John Early Scaff was born on 18 December 1848 according to his legislative bio.[12]
- Margaret Scaff was born on 18 August 1853 according to her death certificate.
- Marintha Scaff: I have found no information other than that she died before 30 January 1854.

If Margrett's date of birth is correct then she was the child under the age of one. But even then, it leaves unanswered which of Ezekiel's wives was Margrett's mother. And

[7] Darlington Co., SC, Deed Book R, pp. 515-516, images 270-271.
[8] Darlington Co., S.C., Equity court records, Bill no. 457, image 195.
[9] Ibid., image 209.
[10] The ordering of the children was consistent when the parties to the second suit were named and sometimes when the one fifth part due to Ezekiel's children were named, but at other times Marintha's name appeared between Emily and John Early (image 202); sometimes it was lined out in this latter list (lower on the page in image 202, image 203).
[11] Darlington Co., S.C., Equity court records, Bill no. 457, images 204-205.
[12] "Legislative blue book of Florida, 1915: containing biographical sketches of governor and cabinet, Senate, House of Representatives and Supreme Court of Florida", Section 8, p. 107; Florida Heritage Collection (https://palmm.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/usf%3A54314/toc).

there's still the question of who the younger females were in Ezekiel's 1840 Darlington County household. Chloe was probably one of the females under age 5 and Marintha might have been the other, but the female aged 10-15 seems likelier to have been some other female relative rather than a daughter; first, because of the age gap between her and the other two, and second, because of the Chancery suit record. But Marintha might also have been born between 1840 and 1854, there's simply no way to know; having the 1850 census record for this family would have gone a long way toward answering these questions.

Conflicting evidence

John Early Scaff's legislative bio states that he was born in Darlington County in 1848; that his parents were Ezekiel Scaff and Miss Elizabeth Hill, both of South Carolina; that his mother died when he was two years old; and that his father subsequently married a Miss Dunn of Houston County, Georgia. This account of Elizabeth Hill's death carries weight given his proximity to the event but there is room to question what he actually remembers from an early age about the particulars and how much is based on what he was told about it as he grew older. This question is even more relevant in light of the Chancery suit records; the year 1856 marking Ezekiel's earliest known appearance in Houston County; and other records reviewed below.

Margrett Scaff Gibbs' death certificate: Margrett's son Jasper W. "Jack" Gibbs was the informant. This record names her as Margaret Scalf Gibbs; states she was born on 18 August 1853 in Charleston, South Carolina; and identifies her parents as Ezekiel Scalf and Miss Hill, both of South Carolina. It's difficult to parse this record because of the incorrect maiden name and the implausibility of her having been born in Charleston, a location not otherwise associated with this family. But it's noteworthy he identified her mother as Miss Hill, Ezekiel Scaff's long-deceased first wife: how would he even know this name unless it's what Margrett had told him? On the other hand, he would have known Elizabeth Dunn Scaff personally as he was in his early 20s when she died in Wilcox County where he and Margrett lived.

Elizabeth Dunn Scaff's widow's pension application: Elizabeth stated that she and Ezekiel Scaff married in August 1853 but she did not say where. Traditionally, women married from their parents' home but no record could be found in Houston County, which has marriage records from 1833.[13]

Elizabeth Dunn's Darlington County and Hill connections

Based on the aforementioned widow's pension application and an affidavit Elizabeth gave in support of Mahala Hill's widow's pension application, she was born in Darlington

[13] Houston County marriages, Georgia Archives (https://georgiaarchives.org/); path: Start> Virtual Vault> Marriage Records from Microfilm> select Houston County.

County in 1826.[14] Elizabeth stated that she and Mahalia Hill (née Hill) were first cousins. It's not yet clear exactly how they connect but a case can be made that Elizabeth's paternal grandmother was Nancy Dunn, the daughter Isaac Hill named in his 1799 will.

Elizabeth's father, Joseph Dunn, was a head of household in Darlington County on the 1820 and 1830 censuses, with his 1820 household including a female aged 45 or over that might have been Nancy Dunn. His household was enumerated in Houston County in 1840 but Joseph first appeared on tax lists there in 1835. He was not on the next earliest tax list in 1831,[15] but the family apparently made the move there shortly thereafter as Elizabeth's younger brother Elijah was born in Georgia in about 1832 according to the 1850 census record for this family.

Concerning the Scaff-Dunn marriage there is a possibility that's purely speculative but shouldn't be ruled out given the Dunn family's Darlington connection: that the family or members thereof went back to visit relatives sometime after 1850 and this is where Elizabeth met and married Ezekiel. The lack of a marriage record would not be surprising since South Carolina did not require the registration of marriages until 1911.[16]

This scenario would be consistent with family lore that was passed down to me, that Margrett Scaff's mother died when she was born and Ezekiel remarried soon thereafter to provide his children with a mother. Generally speaking, I don't put much stock in family lore because I've too often found it to be inconsistent with contemporaneous records but in this case, again, it shouldn't be ruled out.[17]

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[14] Sincere thanks to Andy Hill for sharing a copy of this record.
[15] "Tax digest, 1831-1835", image 125, in Georgia, Houston County, tax records, 1829-1869 collection, FamilySearch.
[16] "How to Find South Carolina Marriage Records," wiki, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/How_to_Find_South_Carolina_Marriage_Records).
[17] See also, "DNA matches with Darlington County Hills" by this compiler.